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Hemispheric Security Relations

Remodeling the U.S. Framework for the Americas

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Conclusions

Changes in the U.S. approach to security affairs in the Americas are being influenced by:

- The April 1998 Presidential Summit in Santiago, Chile, which provided a catalyst for replacing the demeaning, assistance-focused mind-set of U.S. hemispheric security policy.
- Hemispheric and sub-regional trade and investment partnerships that provide a model on which to base cooperation in security affairs.
- The need for the United States to be committed to multilateral partnerships on a voluntary, ad hoc basis, and, to the acceptance of a gradual move toward military interoperability.

Challenge at the End of an Era

The standard U.S. approach to security relations in the Western Hemisphere is at the end of an era. Deep and widespread changes in the hemisphere's political and economic environment over the last 20 years have introduced anomalies that the existing U.S. paradigm did not anticipate. Transformations in Latin America and the Caribbean since the Cold War have produced a growing sense that Washington's past experience is no longer adequate to meet problems shaped by an environment that it in part created. Outlines of the coming era seem visible in the trend toward regional cooperation found in recurring meetings of the region's defense ministers, the close diplomatic and military collaboration among six countries in the Military Observer Mission Ecuador-Peru, and the measures being adopted by neighbors to build mutual confidence. The United States is moving in this security milieu without a clear view of the horizon or a plan of action to get there.

The existing U.S. paradigm is no longer a reliable guide for relations with inter-American states or for defining the hemisphere's place in the broader context of U.S. global interests. Grounded in continental defense, Soviet containment, and now U.S. "engagement," three organizing principles and a mind-set constitute the core of the current paradigm. The principles stress:

- ensuring the primacy of U.S. interests and autonomy of action in the Americas

- excluding extra-hemispheric influences hostile to U.S. interests, particularly in the Caribbean Basin
- protecting U.S. interests with limited resources.

Underlying the principles is an assistance-focused mind-set—a deep belief that the United States must tutor, supply, and in many ways aid, or manipulate, the region's "developing" states.

Washington has to decide whether these principles remain valid in 1998, and, if not, what might replace them. Is its mind-set still appropriate or is it detrimental? What approach is best suited to pursuing U.S. regional and global interests in a hemisphere undergoing dramatic changes?

Until the April 1998 Presidential Summit of the Americas in Chile, no external catalyst urged U.S. policymakers to confront the significance of regional trends and reconstruct the existing security framework. In 1994, the Miami Summit launched several cooperative programs based on common economic and political visions, but the will to work together did not extend to security matters. This changed in Chile when presidents and prime ministers agreed to "promote regional dialogue [on building confidence and security] with a view to revitalizing and strengthening the institutions of the Inter-American System, taking into account the new political, economic, social and strategic-military factors in the Hemisphere and in its sub-regions." Before responding, the United States needs to rethink its own conceptual approach to regional security and decide how the Americas fit in its global vision. The options include:

- continuing to assert U.S. security interests in the region, but work to broaden the scope and improve the quality of collaborative efforts and past assistance-related programs. The region does not play a role in global security strategy.
- remodeling the security framework, leaving an era dominated by unilateral interests, to encourage genuine partnership, military interoperability, reciprocity, and the promotion of shared regional and global interests—in other words, to pursue the potential of this neighborhood in security affairs in the same positive way the United States has pursued cooperation in trade and investment.

This paper develops the second option with a review of the traditional model, presenting examples of how anomalies confront the paradigm, and suggesting a conceptual structure better suited to contemporary circumstances. It concludes with a short list of preliminary steps to start the security framework rebuilding process.

The Traditional Security Framework

With its autonomy assured by economic and military dominance, the United States has long been able to protect or promote its regional interests. Three traditional organizing principles governed by a "fatherly," assistance-focused mind-set have defined Washington's standard reactive approach to engaging American neighbors. The United States has sought: (1) to ensure its primacy in the hemisphere, (2) to exclude from the region extra-hemispheric influences hostile to North America, and (3) to protect its interests using limited resources. The three principles are interconnected. The first may hold only if the second is accomplished. Applying the second may not assure the first (e.g., powerful non-state actors and chronic internal instability can threaten U.S. interests). The third may be sustained only if the

preceding two are accomplished. U.S. political concerns, economic aid, intelligence collection, and military activity have been disproportionately greater in the Caribbean Basin than in the rest of Latin America. Today, issues associated with the Caribbean—international crime, migration, drug trafficking, and the restoration of democracy in Panama and Haiti—continue to command U.S. public attention.

The mind-set that permeates the current security framework combines three factors: (1) a historic conviction that the United States must guide neighboring states through democratization and development; (2) a belief in U.S. pre-eminence as the region's military tutor and the supplier of trading opportunities, foreign investment and aid; and (3) the region's actual need, early in the Cold War, for developmental and military assistance. Latin American and Caribbean neighbors are seen as developing, "subordinate" states. Many U.S. officials assume that Washington can control arms sales and defense spending in general, institutionalize democratic civil-military relations, and overcome domestic political instability. The mind-set is found in today's engagement activities to shape the region: counterdrug operations, foreign assistance, military humanitarian and civic assistance exercises, conferences on human rights, and opportunities for military-to-military contact. As seen by American neighbors, however, the three principles and the dominant mind-set reflect the U.S. tendency to see the region only through North American eyes and to impose its solutions without consultation or understanding of inherent complexities. Most regional governments do not share the current U.S. conception of security priorities which emphasize combatting drug trafficking, promoting democracy, and strengthening regional stability. They define security in terms of defending sovereignty, trade integration and development, redefining the military's role in society, fighting poverty, and curbing domestic crime and violence. One official framed the problem well: "It is hard to work together when there is only one security issue [terrorism] on which we agree."

Contemporary Anomalies

The unprecedented return of democracy, the emergence of open economies, the globalization of trade and finance, the international influence of non-state actors, and other trends have produced anomalies that confound the traditional paradigm's expectations.

Integration and Independence. Latin American and Caribbean countries have stopped automatically looking northward or deferring to the United States in security matters. The ability of Washington to influence regional events is weakening. The existing paradigm does not envision a region in which trade and investment are integrating states and the presence of many extra-hemispheric interests has grown dramatically. Nations have stronger economies today. The flow of goods, capital, manpower and information in response to lower tariff and non-tariff barriers has increased within sub-regional pacts, such as the Southern Cones trading bloc (MERCOSUR) and the Central American Common Market. The region as a whole is becoming a relatively stable market in the global economy, and the United States faces strong and growing economic competition for the first time since 1945. Latin American governments are cultivating investment, as well as political and security relationships, with the European Union, Japan, China and others. External actors present a new counterbalance to the weight of U.S. influence in the hemisphere.

Multilateral and Bilateral Focus. Transnational security issues, from narcotics and arms trafficking to environmental awareness and the defense of democracy, defy the paradigm emphasis on "hub and spoke" solutions. While bilateral arrangements are important, multinational plans, procedures and institutions are a necessity. The commonality of most major issues, transnational threats, limited national response capabilities, and even many domestic problems challenge governments, including the United States, to overcome their traditional hesitation to cooperate with neighbors. Anti-drug programs provide an

example of prolonged bilateral efforts that have not achieved U.S. security interests. A multinational anti-drug initiative, sponsored by the United States, and adopted at the Santiago Summit suggests a commitment finally to move in a more effective direction.

Leadership. U.S. regional leadership is assumed in the traditional paradigm. Washington's recent policy signals, however, have left international observers unsure of U.S. commitment. On the one hand, at the 1994 Miami Summit the United States praised the convergence of democratic values and economic interests and argued persuasively for the creation a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by 2005. President Clinton's visits to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America in 1997, and his return in April 1998 for a second summit, suggest strong interest within the executive branch. On the other hand, U.S. Congressional decisions belie this view. Critics point to the Helms-Burton Act, the process of "certifying" countries receiving U.S. assistance in the drug war, the non-expansion of NAFTA to Chile, and, above all, the congressional rejection of "fast track" authority. From a Latin American and Caribbean perspective, a sincere sense of partnership is far more important today than leadership, a fact recognized by the European Union in its dealings with regional states.

Military Anomalies

The security framework's military dimension has taken many forms of bilateral assistance over time, from military sales and professional education to intelligence sharing and military-political conferences. The United States has nurtured military relationships, helped countries face internal instability, and provided institutional development. However, Washington has also been an unreliable source of support, imposing restrictions on bilateral assistance to send political messages.

Democratization, peace, the conflicting challenges of today's security environment, and changing professional military needs place a strain on the traditional paradigm. The standard U.S. approach no longer satisfies regional security expectations. Most armed forces want operational contact to improve professional capabilities and modernize doctrine. In past practice, the United States has approached cooperation by pressing a country to accept the U.S. agenda, which might not have been in its interest, and by compensating with attractive assistance programs to help the government respond as desired. Reciprocity, common standards for technical and tactical interoperability, and interest in a genuine partnership have long been absent. Consequently, when Washington needed to assemble a large multinational force in the Persian Gulf in February 1998, regional governments refused to contribute, in part because their forces lacked cooperative experience with the United States.

Many states would like to develop more professional, operational contacts. With the exception of naval forces, the United States has shown tepid interest in promoting close working relations or in developing the interoperability found with its European and East Asian allies. It is still difficult, for example, to communicate by radio. Foreign liaison officers have only recently been allowed on U.S. surveillance aircraft or at military command posts employed in anti-drug operations. Washington sponsors exercises focused on peacekeeping. The training offers U.S. technical advice and nurtures collaboration among neighboring Latin and Caribbean countries. The United States has not encouraged cooperation with its Armed Forces outside the region. Opportunities to agree on common American interoperability standards for future peace operations are being lost. And exercises do not prepare neighbors to work with European counterparts using NATO standards.

From a regional perspective, military relations with the United States are losing importance. In the Southern Cone, for example, the advent of MERCOSUR and mutual acceptance of several confidence- and security-building measures have led to a significant improvement in cooperation among the defense

institutions of Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Overcoming severe mutual distrust, an annual series of academic conferences begun early in the 1990s has given way to unprecedented bilateral military and naval exercises between these neighbors. South American governments also look outside the hemisphere. The Rio Group regularly engages in a security dialogue with the European Union. Several countries have joined extra-regional training exercises sponsored, for example, by NATO or South Africa.

Remodeling the Security Framework

A pragmatic U.S. security framework recognizing Latin American and Caribbean states' determination to define their role in world affairs is needed. The 1998 Summit provides Washington a catalyst for shifting its security paradigm, and the 1994 Summit suggests how. In Miami, the Summit participants agreed to build a partnership for development and prosperity. The experience of MERCOSUR, and regional progress toward collaborating on a structure for multilateral trade, can be applied to security affairs. The model suggests that the U.S. ability to act as a great power in a financially and technologically integrated world is enhanced by identifying shared interests with Inter-American neighbors, developing mutual confidence, and creating capabilities for multinational cooperation on international issues.

At the core of the new paradigm are two organizing principles and a mind-set that are sensitive to regional perspectives and committed to developing partnerships whenever possible. The principles stress: (1) respecting state sovereignty yet working closely with regional partners to achieve common interests, and (2) pursuing U.S. interests with limited resources. The underlying mind-set focuses on the importance of cooperation. Genuine cooperation among partners means reciprocity, transparency and institutional accountability. There is a give and take among parties pursuing common objectives. It will require time, innovation, understanding, and perseverance in the United States and across the Americas to bridge the asymmetries of power as well as the cultural differences to produce mutually beneficial cooperation.

Commitment and reciprocity in military partnerships encourage close working relations and ultimately interoperability. A formal hemispheric alliance structure is unnecessary. Building confidence in the idea of ad hoc partnerships within sub-regions for a few common missions is a start. In time, as comfort levels increase, the nature of the cooperation can be expanded.

Recommendations

Changing the U.S. security paradigm begins with an awareness of existing inconsistencies and a willingness to develop a more appropriate approach. Several shifts in design and execution are necessary.

Support Concept. The paradigm transition requires a commitment to pursue multilateral partnerships of a voluntary, ad hoc and informal nature to address common security issues. The United States needs to express its desire to operate militarily with Latin American, Caribbean, and North American counterparts on search and rescue, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions. Standards of interoperability for these missions need to be pursued and established. A realistic timetable should be set for accomplishing this goal. Other military missions might be added in the future.

Gradually Develop Military Partnerships. Washington must show that "engagement" today also means commitment to ad hoc military partnerships to pursue common objectives. Interoperability of

equipment and operational doctrine is essential. Common (NATO) standards simplify the task and de-link from exclusively U.S. requirements. Movement toward interoperability should begin in the functional area of command, control, and communication. As the NATO Partnership for Peace experience suggests, however, this step is complex and requires time, creativity, funding, and patience.

Avoid Competition. There is no need to challenge existing or emerging security arrangements such as the Rio Pact, or the ongoing security dialogue on security matters taking place between South American states and non-regional, primarily European, counterparts.

Review New Conceptual Approach with Ministers of Defense. A Defense Ministerial meeting would provide a venue and an opportunity to explain a changing perspective within the U.S. security framework, its emphasis on regional partnerships, and the new U.S. commitment to voluntary, ad hoc working relationships and to achieving interoperability for search and rescue, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions.

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